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# Exploring the Consequences of Mobility: Reclaiming Jet Lag as the State of Travel Disorientation

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**ABSTRACT** This paper explores the consequences of mobility for those engaged in long-distance, high-speed travel. It reclaims the notion of jet lag and repositions it as the broader phenomenon of 'travel disorientation' which involves geographical dislocation, circadian disruption, psychological disorientation and cultural displacement. It is through this temporary disorientation that long-haul travellers experience heightened awareness to difference, increased capacity to witness and an inability to control physical and affective capabilities. The paper identifies the need to explore these provisional worlds of experience and to this end introduces the notion of 'the state' as a way to conceptualise the conditions that join us to and define our relations with the world.

**KEY WORDS:** Travel, Disorientation, Jet lag, Mobility, Adjustment, State, People, Place

## Introduction

I often think that I've travelled into a deeply foreign country under jet lag, somewhere more mysterious in its way than India or Morocco. A place that no human had ever been until forty or so years ago, and yet, now, a place where more and more of us spend more and more of our lives. It's not quite a dream state, and yet it's certainly not wakefulness; and though it seems another continent we're visiting, there are no maps or guide-books yet to this other world. (Iyer 2005, 158/9)

As many scholars working in the field have identified (see e.g. Sheller and Urry 2004, 2006; Adey 2009; Cresswell 2010), mobility has consequences. The act of mobility not only changes the world around us, but also affects the individual undertaking movement. This paper focuses on the consequences of mobility for

those involved in long-distance, high-speed travel. It suggests that this form of mobility disrupts the human and their competence in understanding and dealing with the world around them. Before, during and after travel, the individual is (re) positioned within new sets of socio-spatial relations which temporarily disorient and fragment the consolidated rhythms of normal life. High-speed, long-distance travel (often undertaken for business, leisure or tourism<sup>1</sup>) moves individuals outside their normal spaces and rhythms, and into strange new worlds with different customs, surveillances, (im)mobilities, cultures, time zones and languages (see Pizam 1999; Robinson 1999; Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001; Reisinger and Turner 2003; Edensor 2007). As the next section outlines, this disorientation is commonly understood as jet lag, defined as a set of physiological ailments caused by alterations to circadian rhythm. This paper problematises the narrow definition of this experience and reasserts that such disruption is geographical, emotional, psychological as well as physical in nature. It argues that when experiencing these disruptive conditions, our perception, understanding and positioning within the world is changed. We become disoriented in relation to our normal spaces of home and work, our accustomed social identities, our everyday emotions and our familiar psychologies. This paper argues that mobilities scholars should pay attention to these consequences of mobility as they offer us important insight into the human condition. The social and spatial disruption caused by mobility gives new perspectives not only on taken-for-granted socio-spatial relations (our relations to 'A'), but also on the new and extraordinary worlds that mobility has granted access to (our relations to 'B'). Answering the call from Hottola (2004, 460) for more, 'theoretically-inspired field research on intercultural adaptation', paying attention to these consequences of mobility also gives insight into the process of human adjustment from 'A' to 'B', its pacing, its problems and its possibilities. Drawing on these insights, this paper argues that the combined consequences of this form of mobility outreach the common description of jet lag and are better framed as 'travel disorientation'. Travel disorientation can be defined as the holistic consequences of leaving one set of socio-spatial relations and moving to another. From this new framing, the paper argues that such disorientations can be understood as the 'state' of travel disorientation.

The paper continues by first outlining the approach taken to explore travel disorientation, and then continues to make the case for moving beyond jet lag as the appropriate framing for the human consequences of high-speed, geo-temporal mobility. The paper then outlines the 'state' as key conceptual tool to frame the temporary condition of travel disorientation and illustrates some key aspects of this condition through reference to empirical research. These illustrations are presented in the form of a chronological return journey from 'A' to 'B' and following these, conclusions to the paper are offered.

## Approaching Travel Disorientation

Exploring travel disorientation necessitates a general approach to study that pays attention to the ways in which individuals can be immersed within (but then be disrupted from) locational contexts. A 'dwelling' approach facilitates such a focus (after Ingold 1993; Anderson and Moles 2008). Such an approach moves beyond the 'sterile opposition' of configuring environments as neutral backdrops to human activities, or as cognitive or symbolic orderings of space (after Ingold 1993, 152).

Rather, it configures environments as constituted by socio-spatial relations and as such, prioritises the, 'knowledge born of immediate experience, by privileging the understandings that people derive from their lived, everyday involvement in the world' (1993, 152). Such a 'dwelling perspective' complements the aims of this paper as it sensitises us to the contemporary and changing experiences of environments and accesses the knowledge of those who are experiencing them.

This paper operationalises this perspective by firstly acknowledging that travel disorientation is not essential in nature. As a consequence, a range of interviewees were chosen to exemplify a broad typology of disorientation experiences, including those who enable and service jet travel and primarily experience the bodily affects of jet lag (e.g. pilots and flight attendants); yet, those who travel do not always encounter culture shocks (through inhabiting the non-places (after Augé 2008) of commercial centres, conference halls and hotels, e.g. business travellers); and those who travel for cultural immersion or new experiences (e.g. holiday makers and tourists). This research interviewed a total of 33 respondents, roughly split between each category, and combined these with a further two focus groups of leisure travelers and three first-hand diaries of those experiencing travel disorientation in real time (including autoethnographic accounts by the author). These primary sources were triangulated with secondary evidence (through scholarly reports on jet lag, literary first-hand accounts of travel disorientation and website postings from travel bloggers) and from this triangulation, key themes related to the consequences of mobility (e.g. geographical dislocation, circadian disruption, psychological disorientation and cultural displacement) were identified. These key themes were utilised to bring together the broader argument of the paper that framing jet lag as the key consequence of high-speed, long-distance travel fails to capture the full repercussions of this form of modern mobility.

## Beyond Jet Lag

The consequences of moving at high speed over large distances are commonly understood by, and reduced to, the notion of 'jet lag'. Jet 'lag', or 'the act of falling behind' as a consequence of high-speed air travel is a useful term in the sense that it infers a geo-temporal disruption has occurred between a person and their environment. The individual has fallen behind (or rushed ahead) of their normal time zone and this temporal and geographical dislocation disrupts circadian rhythm and biophysical function (as we will discuss further below). Jet lag is, therefore, a 'disruptive' experience; definitionally, it 'agitates, confuses, dis-orders, disturbs, interferes with, interrupts, upsets, and unsettles' (Collins Dictionary). Such geo-temporal mobility also 'dis-oriens'; it 'causes (someone) to lose (their) bearings', it 'perplexes and confuses' (Collins Dictionary). Such descriptors are useful as they serve to emphasise the agency of jet lag and the consequences it has for the actor being moved. Such emphasis counters the notion that these consequences are simply a distraction, but more a kind of 'spatial and temporal abuse' (Lopez 1998, 102).

However, the abuse wreaked on the human body by high-speed long-distance mobility is far greater than those acknowledged by the narrow definition of jet lag. As Ehret and Waller Scanlon tell us (1983, 20), 'Jet lag starts when you have to adjust ... your own daily internal biological rhythms of sleeping and waking, digestion and elimination, on the basis of a new time and place'. Jet lag, thus, refers

to the physiological and biological consequences of mobility to new time zones. Medically, this state is defined as a disruption to the body's circadian rhythm. As Rozell identifies:

all organisms, from one-celled creatures to humans, synchronize to the earth's 24-hour rotation cycle. This cycle dictates when they sleep, wake, secrete hormones and perform other bodily functions. (1995, 1261)

Nearly, all physiological and behavioural functions in humans occur on a rhythmic basis, which in turn leads to dramatic diurnal changes in human capacity (after Thomas 2005). Travelling at high speed into new time zones disrupts these cycles, causing circadian dysrhythmia. As Graeber puts it:

Normally, when we are living at home, our circadian rhythm resembles a finely tuned symphony, each rhythm rising and falling, not at the same time, but at its own prescribed time in harmony with one another. This internal synchronisation does not persist after transmeridian flight. Even though our myriad circadian rhythms are timed by only one or two clocks, they all do not resynchronise together. (1988, 312)

When experiencing circadian dysrhythmia or 'desynchronosis', the body has to readjust its functions over a minimum of 2–3 days (see Graeber, 1988).<sup>2</sup> A range of physical ailments are symptoms of this adjustment, as Hawkins outlines:

Sleep disturbance is experienced; bowel elimination and eating habits may be disrupted. Lassitude, anxiety, irritability and depression are often reported. Objectively, there is evidence of slowed reaction and decision-making times, defective memory for recent events, errors in computations and ... a tendency to accept lower standards of operational performance. (1987, 48)

Desynchronosis is, therefore, a significant physical manifestation of a changed set of socio-spatial conditions. Due to geo-temporal mobility, the human body's relation to its physical place becomes 'out of sync', a condition that may last for several days and fundamentally influences the way in which that body senses itself and its relation to the world. As Parker puts it,

jet lag is penance, payback, protest – roughly equivalent in moral force, I'd say, to the hangover. It reminds us not just that we have bodies, but that we are bodies. Flout the time zones and you will feel unusual. (2010)

However, desynchronosis is not the only disruption experienced by the mobile individual. Ehret and Waller Scanlon identify that further disorientation occurs to a traveller's 'sense of place' and 'sense of well-being':

all living organisms have a keen sense of place and express it either consciously or unconsciously. In man [sic], consciously it makes him homesick for familiar surroundings and wish for his own bed, and unconsciously he yearns for the accustomed hometown patterns of something as simple as the timeframe of the sunrise and sunset ... Inextricably dependent

on sense of time and sense of place is sense of well-being. An upheaval in the sense of time or sense of place, or both, precipitates a disruption in a person's sense of well-being ... Now man soars encapsulated in a jet plane from east to west or west to east with an abandon beyond the wildest dreams of any winged or finned creature on earth. Yet, still possessed of essentially a Stone Age body that should be travelling great distances very, very slowly, if at all, he suffers the consequences in the form of lag. (1983, 17–18)

As Ehret and Waller Scanlon describe, geo-temporal mobility disorients the traveller in ways that go beyond the physiological disruptions of jet lag. Indeed, the lure of such mobility, as the writer and essayist Pico Iyer describes, is that 'we don't go from A to B so much as from A to Z, or from A to Alpha' (Iyer 2005, 163, my emphasis). For Iyer, the appeal of geo-temporal mobility is that we intentionally exchange our normal and taken-for-granted relationship to the places and people around us for new sets of relationships, and as a consequence, some form of adjustment is required. These new relationships are constituted in many ways: as we have seen, travelling to 'Z' repositions us in relation to the diurnal movement of the sun and commonly results in disruption to sleep pattern and circadian rhythm. Yet, as we depart 'from A', we leave the routines and relationships of our home place and move 'to Z' in terms of the new friendships and prospective roots in places many miles away. These new relations are influenced by the new geographical contexts in which travellers find themselves – the altitude, weather, temperature, humidity or pollution conditions in 'Z' may be very different to 'A', making us feel more ourselves or more uncomfortable. Travellers will also encounter new and extraordinary cultural practices in 'Alpha' when compared to 'A'. Different languages, commodities, religions and currencies may serve to disrupt existing understandings, whilst even the transitions involved in journeying from 'A' to 'Alpha' may themselves create new experiences; the physical conditions we encounter through the dry air and physical constraints of an airline cabin, for example, may result in affective and bodily disruption. Thus, the consequences of geo-temporal mobility are not simply encapsulated by the speed of getting from A to B, but it also includes the rhythms and feel of departure and destination, their novelty, familiarity and – perhaps most importantly – the friction involved in experiencing the transition between these sets of relations (see also Cresswell 2010). As Ehret and Waller Scanlon tell us,

bodily rhythms exhibit a kind of lingering memory and resist change. In order to keep you running smoothly, they want to cling to the same old familiar schedule on the basis of the past time and place cues. The old rhythms corresponding to when the sun would have risen or set back home, when your alarm would have gone off, when you would have eaten, when you would have used the toilet and when you would have been working or socialising, each of these old rhythms persist tenaciously. (1983, 20)

Travel disorientation, thus, refers to the temporary disruptions experienced when individuals are out of sync with the world around them as a consequence of geo-temporal mobility: when the body anticipates sleep during the day and wants dinner in the early hours; when it longs for family and the familiar, but it receives strangers and the exotic; and when social cues are alien or absent and the rhythm of life has become defined by cellular, psychological and cultural chaos. Travel

disorientation exists until these frictions are overcome, until body and cultural clocks reset themselves and until we have found our bearings in a new set of socio-spatial relations.

### The State of Travel Disorientation

Travel disorientation can be defined as the holistic consequences of leaving one set of socio-spatial relations and moving to another. From this new framing, the paper argues that such disorientations can be understood as the 'state' of travel disorientation. In this context, the notion of the 'state' does not refer to a national entity with circumscribed boundaries, but rather to a temporary condition that joins us to and defines our relations with the world. The notion of the state is at once an experiential condition; it is physically sensed, affectively felt, psychologically considered and cognitively reflected upon. However, the state is not simply human in a physical sense; it is also crucially defined by geographical place. The state is influenced by the environment that the individual experiences, but also the cultural customs and ideologies of that location. The state also has a temporal dimension. Although we may wish 'to state' categorically and definitively, the notion of the state implies an existing but temporary condition, one whose final defining feature will be its propensity to change. By drawing attention to the 'state' as an experiential object of study, the paper argues that it is through states that we are joined to and define our relations with the world; it is through states that, as a consequence, we perceive and value ourselves and the world. In different states, we may see the world very differently and our role within it in a radically different way. Through focusing on the consequences of mobility, this paper suggests that scholars may not simply study a world of objective 'places' or 'societies', but also the worlds sensed by those experiencing them (after Merleau-Ponty 1962; Tuan 1977; Tilley 1994); more specifically, we can study a world 'in state' or a world of 'states'.<sup>3</sup> By exploring the state of travel disorientation, the paper identifies the need for an exploration of these new worlds for which, as Iyer tells us, there are as yet 'no maps or guide-books ... there are not even any clocks' (2005, 159). The paper continues by drawing on empirical work to illustrate some of the key aspects of the state of travel disorientation. It does so by presenting them in the form of a chronological journey from 'A' to 'B' and back again.

### Travel Disorientation: Anticipation, Encounter and Adaption

Alienness inheres not in a place ... but in our relation to it. (Iyer 2005, 221)

The state of travel disorientation is influenced by a number of factors. From the research undertaken, key factors include the location, time and variety of departure; the reasons for travel; the form of travelling party; and the destination chosen. However, the state of disorientation experienced will not solely in here to the type of travel or in the places left and arrived at, but as Iyer tells us, in our relations to these entities/processes. Despite the rise of jet travel, for many, geo-temporal mobility is not an everyday experience and due to this novelty (and countering conventional wisdom that travel disorientation only occurs on arrival at a new location<sup>4</sup>), many anticipate and, thus, begin experiencing disruption even before the

home place is departed. It is thus the case that our relations to imminent travel can disrupt our sense of place and well-being; as Hottola comments, we begin to ask ourselves an array of rhetorical questions:

Will the visit fulfil my expectations? Will I stay healthy? Will my friend water my plants while I am away? (2004, 456)

From my own experience, the morning prior to long-haul travel always focuses the mind on the impending change, as I wrote in a diary prior to a trip from the UK to South-East Asia:

Day of flight: anticipation 'state'. Orientation to the trip starts today. Preparation began yesterday when I got home from work – what clothes do I need to take? what needs washing? Even an impromptu: 'will all this fit in one bag?' But today it's all real. Tonight we're travelling so tomorrow will be different. Relative unease at that prospect.

From the research conducted, imminent travel often places existing socio-spatial relations in a new perspective. Responsibilities and relationships that can seem restrictive when we are in them may begin to seem remarkable as we prepare to leave. Existing norms come to seem novel and reassuring, whilst uncertainty over the future makes change seem risky or foolhardy. Change, or even the threat of change, alters the relations that constitute home, so much so that as we prepare to leave, its cartography changes in front of our eyes. Its composing parts begin to move (or are removed), their emotional weight is rendered unstable and our relations to them are altered. Home as we know it is no longer the same 'thing'; it (and we) has (and have) changed. As Hottola comments, for leisure travellers, home becomes a place for planning and fantasising about a forthcoming trip, romanticising the place and identity of the other (see 2004, 455). As departure nears, such positive expectations combine with more immediate stresses, as the following respondent documents:

Will I get up in time for my flight tomorrow? Will my flight go on time? Will it be really busy on the plane? I start to get a bit anxious. I have to check in for the flight 3 hours before, which means getting to the airport at 5 am. I need to get on the 4.15 am airport shuttle, so I have to get up at 3.45 am. I've gone to bed early and tried to get some sleep but its still light outside. All I can do is watch movies. (Field Diary, Occasional Traveller)

Anticipating travel can, therefore, engender a new set of socio-spatial relations even if the imminent traveller remains in familiar surroundings. The consequences of mobility have commenced before any actual movement has occurred: the state of travel disorientation has begun.

Moving to and through places of travel also involves a range of experiences that disrupt normal socio-spatial relations. The place of the car, for example, may calm or bore a seasoned driver, whilst the place of highway congestion is likely to enrage the time-sensitive passenger. Concerns over the availability of airport car parks or the whereabouts of important travel documents can affect the emotions of the traveller, making the world seem frustrating or bewildering. As a consequence, the



traveller experiences a range of personal consequences due to his/her (im)mobility; as the following respondent recounts in relation to a miscalculation of travel time to a flight in Asia:

Our friend had come with us ... and he was like, 'oh come on, just come for a last drink'. And I was like, 'No, no, no, we need to get our flight'. But he was like, 'ah come on its fine, just chill out, we'll just get a drink', and so we ended up just getting on the last possible bus. And instead of taking the 45 minutes it should have taken it took an hour and twenty. We got to the airport at 9.40 am for a 10.00 am flight. I was beside myself. (Respondent Interview: Regular Traveller)

This respondent alludes to the specific personal consequences of her mobility – 'I was beside myself'. Although this may be read as simply a colloquial articulation of her stress at nearly missing her flight, it can also be seen to refer to one aspect of the state of travel disorientation: the imminent fragmentation of her socio-spatial relationship. Such phrases imply not just the multiplicity of identity (i.e. any one person is recognised as constituted by a multi-sided, fractured and often contradictory self (see e.g. Jameson 1991; Hall 1996; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002)), but also that identity can be fragmented in time and place (a spatial division of identity if you will, see Anderson 2004). In this case, one 'version' of the individual – the tourist who has adjusted to and inhabited the place of departure – is being cleaved from a second 'version' – the other who is about to get on a plane to somewhere (and become someone) else. Being 'beside oneself' can, thus, refer to this tacit acknowledgement that a new set of socio-spatial relations are being set in motion through mobility and that these have emotionally affective consequences. Individuals are getting ahead of themselves, or need to catch up with themselves; there is an awareness of the need, but currently impossible to 'pull yourself together'.

The process of mobility, therefore, has disruptive effects both prior to and in the place of the airport. Social science literature has been prolific in identifying aspects of the airport that can affect the relations between people and place (see e.g. Adey 2007, 2008; Augé 2008). The nature of the self is changed by its co-constitution with this new interlocutor – by stepping into the airport, the 'everyday subject' becomes a 'terrorist suspect', a dehumanised entity which needs to be moved from check-in to boarding (via commodity consumption) both efficiently and safely. The individual freedoms taken for granted in 'normal' life are curtailed within the airport, with knock-on effects on the traveller's emotions and psychology. As Parker identifies:

My own theory is that jet lag begins not in midair but the moment one sets foot in the airport. Checking in, passing through security, drifting toward the departure gate – all stages in a glorious slippage of identity. As you hover along the concourse, eyes a-flicker, your tastes and habits fall away. You are between ['A' and 'B']: Unwonted pleasures recommend themselves. You buy an expensive magazine about cars, despite having no interest in cars. At 9:30 in the morning you find yourself eating a plate of General Gao's chicken. Who are you? Without the name printed on your boarding pass you'd have no idea. (2010, no page)

As the above excerpt outlines, moving into and through the place of the airport involves a range of experiences that changes the relationship between the traveller and the world around them. With little time to adjust to the shift from subject to suspect, it is possible to lose a sense of identity in this liminal non-place. The traveller is treated differently, they become someone different – our name is the same (although we may have slipped out of its normal framing), and they behave differently (for example, eating and drinking out-of-kilter foodstuffs or purchasing out-of-the ordinary commodities). This experience is part and parcel of the state of travel disorientation – even before we get on a plane and move quickly over vast distances, we are in a state of disassembly and disruption.

And then: the flight. Infinity skids past your window, the vault of heaven gapes ... (Parker 2010, no page)

Even if everything goes reasonably well, which is often not the case in today's congested air space, the intercontinental flight itself causes considerable physical and mental stress ... (Hottola 2004, 456)

From the airport, the travel experience is influenced primarily by the physical and social parameters of the aeroplane. Here, individuals are subjected to new influences on their behaviour and movement. Travellers are subjected to poor air conditioning and physiological disruption – as Lopez puts it, 'the dehydrating hours aloft, mildly hypoxic, mean tissues [become] swollen from undissolved nitrogen' (1998, 88) and as Iyer recounts, many suffer from, 'the high-frequency hearing loss and super-dry sinuses' as a consequence of, 'flying six hundred miles an hour above the weather in a pressurized metal cabin' (2005, 163); such conditions leave the traveller having to adjust to the psychological and physical threat of deep-vein thrombosis, dry eyes and dehydrated skin. The state of disorientation caused by the aircraft, therefore, adds to the disruption experienced by the traveller: everything is now literally 'up in the air' (see Reitman 2009). In the hyphen between 'A' and 'B', the 'who am I' question we ask ourselves in the airport is now made more complex when trying to definitively answer questions, such as 'Where am I?' or 'What time is it?'. Similarly, in this new 'no-where' space, the orthodoxies of social encounter and emotional disclosure are also 'dispositioned' (after Askins 2009, my emphasis); due to enforced confinement with strangers, relationships take on an intimacy unexpected in normal life. As the following respondents describe, being up in the air:

is like being in uncharted territory. People that you are sitting next to just start talking to you. I remember speaking to this religious guy and he was telling me his whole life story, even about his affairs. He said he had never told anyone about them before but because we were on a plane we were more open and it became kind of acceptable. (Respondent Interview: Regular Traveller)

I have had some great conversations on planes! I was flying from Sydney to Malaysia I think it was, and I was sitting next to a strange guy and every time I fell asleep he would wake me up and say things like, 'there's a bit more of the desert'. He acted straight away as if he was kind of like your brother and had broken down the boundaries [between strangers]. I wouldn't normally

have just woken up someone I didn't know just to say something to them.  
(Respondent Interview: Regular Traveller)

As these respondents suggest, the place of the aircraft blurs not only geo-temporal zones, but also cultural and social boundaries. As the cosmopolitan crowd speeds down the hyphenated corridor between A and B, new and unexpected relationships are created (but also confined) to this liminal zone (as one respondent sums up, 'because you will never really see them [your fellow passengers] again, I think they open up to you' [Interview: Regular Traveller]). Despite how disorienting these physical and personal circumstances may initially be, through their repetition, a state of familiarity often emerges. The frequent flyer may thus be reassured, liberated or even feel at home in the freedom of this 'now-here' state (see Reitman 2009<sup>5</sup>).

The wheels meet the runway with a knife-to-whetstone screech: You've landed. Or have you? Now, like a Himalayan Sherpa, you must 'wait for your soul to catch up'. (Parker 2010, no page)

As Graeber (1988, 312) has told us, 'Normally, when we are living at home, our circadian rhythm resembles a finely tuned symphony'; yet, this 'internal synchronisation does not persist after transmeridian flight'. Due to crossing time zones at accelerated speed, our bodies – still disrupted from the psychological, physical and emotional disorientations of the flight, now revolt to the new cues which disorient their chemical responses and reactions. As Parker puts it:

... the sensation is that one of the clouds you so blithely punctured en route has now installed itself in your skull. (Parker 2010, no page)

Other respondents articulate the state of disorientation upon arrival as follows:

Well I feel a bit hungover. Like you're tired and then sometimes you feel a little bit hungry or sometimes a little bit sick. You don't feel like you're functioning properly. (Respondent Interview: Cabin Crew)

When I think about the whole experience, like when you go through the airport and go through customs and immigrations, you are not yourself when you have been on a plane for 10 or 12 hours. Everything is just heightened and you feel slightly outside yourself. (Respondent Interview: Regular Traveller)

On landing in a new location, a set of physiological disruptions are set in motion by the cessation of our mobility. As the respondents above outline, it is as if another version of ourselves is created on landing. Whilst the 'home' self has been left in the airport, our newly experienced 'inbetween' self has now been left on the plane; our new self, instantly born on arrival in 'B', has to cope with the legacy of these losses. As we have noted above, some of these consequences are physiological; as one respondent describes:

After I get off the plane I am extremely irritable and have massive migraines. I get food and eye it with distaste and revulsion yet later I'm instantly ravenous and gobble it down as if I haven't eaten for a week. My bowels are

completely out of whack – I will save the in-depth description here. My sense of time, place, and schedule have vanished. (Respondent Communication: Regular Traveller)

It is in this disrupted state that travellers encounter the new meteorological, cultural and geographical cues of their destination. On the day of arrival, travellers most keenly feel differences in temperature; they may be assaulted by shifts in humidity, altitude or pollution – and these factors have a consequent affect on skin, mood, breathing, clothing choice, drinking appetite and sleeping patterns. As one respondent describes:

I think the worst was in Malaysia, I turned up early in the morning [after flying from the UK] and there was a car waiting to take me to Kuala Lumpur and there was someone sitting in the car and it was really, really warm and very, very humid, and it just completely wiped me out. The car could not go very fast and there was so much traffic and I was so desperate trying to stay awake. (Respondent Interview: Irregular Traveller)

These bodily disruptions interact with the cultural disorientation travellers face on arrival. Notwithstanding resort hotels, which nevertheless involve new relations of service, quality and absence of everyday work and life routines (Edensor 2007), destinations involve changes to familiar currencies, commodities, customs and rituals, alongside new languages, diseases, infrastructures and levels of poverty or wealth. Travel, therefore, invites us into different cultural orders and geographical borders (Anderson 2010) which are often transgressive to our norms. These encounters foster new insights into our understanding of the world and our relation with it and our capacity to take it all in is sensitised by our state of travel disorientation. As the following respondents describe:

When I flew to Taiwan I was just so tired and didn't know where I was going or what I was doing. And it was more stressful, obviously, with the language difference as well. But at the same time you get these strange bursts of adrenalin. You can be ultra alert even though you're feeling 'ughhh'. (Respondent Interview: Cabin Crew)

I flew from Heathrow to San Francisco, we arrived in the night and this added to the disconnected feeling we had because there wasn't much going on and the city itself was deserted. I had slept for most of the flight and when I woke up I was walking about a very strange city trying to get to where we needed to be. Then for the next few days you try to adjust to the sleeping and because you are out of your normal comfort zone anyway, it becomes part of your experience and you kind of accept that things are strange and different here. (Respondent Focus Group: Regular Traveller)

As implied above, post-flight state is made more complex due to the simultaneous experience of new cultures and geographies under the condition of desynchronosis. As a consequence, the 'here' the respondent refers to above is not simply an objective San Francisco, or even the City he will experience once he has been there for three or four days; rather, it is a place only found in this state of travel



disorientation. It is a world accessible only through this simultaneity of physical and sociocultural change. In this world, travellers see the world differently; as Pico Iyer puts it, 'I feel, when lagged, as if I'm seeing the whole world through tears, or squinting; everything gets through to me, but with the wrong weight or meaning' (2005, 163). As a consequence, individuals respond to the world in peculiar ways, feeling perhaps they have lost their marbles along with their bearings, as the following respondents state:

Even business travellers who are very familiar with travelling act strangely when they first arrive from a flight. I always used to say they lose all sense of common sense because they ask the sort of questions that are really obvious. Like they're sort of saying, 'Umm, where's the postbox?' and they're stood right next to it. (Respondent Interview, Cabin Crew)

Having finally gotten through immigration ... I waited around the metro station for at least fifteen minutes waiting for assistance to use an outrageously complicated travelcard machine. It had a hundred different buttons on it, and stupidly you can't put less than \$2 in the machine even if your fare is less (which mine was). I finally navigated the metro and noticed how sloooooowww the escalators were compared to London. Everything is a bit slower or more complicated here ... (Respondent Field Diary: Irregular Traveller)

The cultural and geographical disorientation of arrival in 'B', thus, further disorients the long-haul traveller. Not only are new signs and symbols encountered, but their meaning and value cannot be fully registered. This may be through foreignness and unfamiliarity, their meaning 'lost in translation' (Coppola 2004<sup>6</sup>) or our reading of them misconstrued through lack of sleep, homesickness or emotional sensitivity. Our world and our selves are not familiar to us in this state – a new world is experienced that is as yet unknown and unexplored. Such disorientation, is therefore, definitive of the travel experience (as is acknowledged in the broader literature on cultural and travel adjustment; see e.g. Pizam 1999; Robinson 1999; Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001; Reisinger and Turner 2003). The travel state involves, in the words of Oberg, a disorientation 'precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all one's familiar signs and symbols of social interaction' (1960, 177). Whilst Oberg terms this disorientation 'culture shock' (Oberg 1960),<sup>7</sup> Hottola (2004) argues a better way to conceptualise this state as one of 'confusion'. However, this is a state of not just cultural disorientation (as the jet lag state is not simply about circadian disruption); this is at once a cultural, geographical, affective and psychological disorientation. In short, the traveller is dislocated from his/her normal socio-spatial relations. They are out of their ordinary and have become out of sync; they need to get their bearings in this new extraordinary world.

As both Oberg (1960) and Hottola (2004) acknowledge, this state of travel disorientation is provisional and temporary. The strange states long-haul travellers lose (then find) themselves in soon become familiar as the initially extraordinary becomes mundane and ordinary. That the state of travel disorientation is provisional and overcome by time in a new place is evidenced by the way many experience new disorientation (and often to a greater extent) on their return from 'B' to 'A'. Through adjusting to travel disorientation, the 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary'

become inverted; the conditions that were taken for granted in our home environment now become the new borders requiring negotiation and adaptation. As the following respondents describe:

It is almost worse coming back because you are now sensitised to what was once familiar. Like coming back into Cardiff you realise how everyone is short and fat or everyone looks really ill! (Respondent Focus Group: Regular Traveller)

I actually went into a supermarket in London after a flight and did a whole weeks shopping and got to the till and tried to pay in dollars. She said 'I can't take that', and I said. 'Why not? It's cash'. I remember looking at her and thinking she was stupid. So I had to put it all back and with that I walked out straight into the glass door. (Respondent Interview: Cabin Crew)

I got home yesterday [from Australia] and it's like when you're a bit hung-over, dehydrated and tired. In the afternoon I walked along the beach at home with my parents. I was looking around but I didn't really feel like I was there. I still feel a little like I'm floating at the moment. (Respondent Interview: Regular Traveller)

Returning to 'B', thus, gives travellers new senses through which to re-encounter their once familiar environments. The norms of currency, anatomy and neighbourhood are experienced in new ways; the 'here' of home has become strange and difficult to engage with. Again, however, this state of disorientation is overcome by time and the extraordinary slips back into the ordinary. This adjustment involves the physical recovery from the manifestations of jet lag, the recovery from the confines of the aircraft and the psychological adjustments involved in returning into the relationships of home. Through these transitions, the traveller becomes redefined by the new socio-spatial relations they encounter. In front of our eyes, the cartographies of home (re)turn to something resembling their pre-travel state.

## Conclusion

This paper has focused on the consequences of mobility for those undertaking high-speed, long-distance travel. It has attempted to reclaim the notion of jet lag as a broader phenomenon which is better understood as 'travel disorientation', or the holistic consequences of leaving one set of socio-spatial relations and moving to another. It has introduced the notion of the state as a way to draw attention to these temporary conditions that join us to and define our relations with the world. Through doing so, the paper re-emphasises that mobility has consequences not only for the world around us, but also for those experiencing high-speed, long-distance travel. Its existence is a reminder that such mobility produces physical, emotional and psychological 'disarray', a 'refusal, by the ever-sensible organism, to keep pace with inhuman modernity' (Parker 2010, no page).

Travel dis and reorientation are, thus, at once cultural, psychological and affective processes. In our travel-induced 'state of philosophical disarray' (the 'not quite a dream state ... yet ... certainly not wakefulness' that Iyer (2005, 158/9) describes), human mobility has created a new perspective through which to view our relations

with the world. It is through this state that long-haul travellers experience their (re) positioning in relation to home, airport, plane and destination. It is through the experiences which characterise these disruptions – the heightened awareness to difference, the increased capacity to witness and our inability to control our physical and affective capabilities – that we ‘privileg[e] the understandings that people derive from their lived, everyday involvement in the world’ (Ingold 1993, 152). In the same way that ‘margins can tell us something about “normalcy”’ (Cresswell 1996, 9), these states offers us temporary portals through which we can be reminded of our values, the overlooked can be revealed and voice can be given to our tenuous but vital relations to the places around us. More generally, by drawing attention to the ‘state’ as an experiential object of study, the paper takes seriously the provisional nature of the human condition and the importance of retaining a sense of becoming in our understanding of socio-spatial relations (see Murdoch 2006; Dovey 2010). In highlighting these new worlds of disorientation, the paper draws attention to other states beyond those of mobility that offer us similar portals into the geographical condition (these may include periods of grief, depression, hallucination, drunkenness, love or loss). Thus, by exploring the state of travel disorientation as a departure point, we identify the need to explore these new geotemporal worlds of experience; a need to draw new maps for the states when you are wholly out of sync in relation to the world; and when you are: ‘kind of “whoa!”’, when you don’t know where you are and feel as if you’re in somebody else’s skin’ (Respondent Interview: Regular Traveller).

## Notes

1. It is possible, of course, for long-distance, high-speed travel to be undertaken for reasons beyond those stated here including, for example, rendition. The consequences of these other types of mobility are not covered by this paper, but as the conclusion discusses, are one example of potential for further research in this area.
2. Many online messageboards suggest that it takes one day to adjust to our hour shift in time zone (see, for example, Trafalgar (no date), Independent Traveller (no date) or Travel Insider (no date); whilst interview respondents suggest it takes between two and seven days to fully recover from long-haul flight desynchronosis.
3. In highlighting these new worlds of disorientation, the paper draws attention to other worlds – or now better put, new ‘states’ – beyond those of mobility that offer us different insights into the human condition. These may include periods of grief, hypnotism, depression, hallucination, love or loss.
4. As Ehret and Waller Scanlon argues, ‘Jet lag begins when you land and step out of an airplane, and not before’ (1983, 20).
5. As the Ryan Bingham character in the film ‘Up in the Air’ outlines, ‘To know me is to fly with me. This is where I live. All the things you probably hate about travelling – the recycled air, the artificial lighting, the digital juice dispensers, the cheap sushi – are warm reminders that I’m home’ (see Reitman 2009, and Script-o-rama, no date).
6. ‘Pam’, a cabin crew member, on the World Hum message board, makes the following comment in relation to Coppola’s film, ‘One of the things I loved about Lost in Translation (besides Bob (Bill Murray) singing Roxy Music’s More than This) was the way it captured that crazy feeling of jetlag. I don’t love being jetlagged, but there is something to be said for being up at 3 am watching TV in the hotel lobby with the graveyard crew – it absolutely makes you feel like you are Somewhere Else’ (www.worldhum.com). Coppola herself describes the process of disorientation through travel in the sleeve notes to the DVD version of her film: ‘Bob’s having a midlife crisis in Japan. Where it’s already confusing ... Charlotte and Bob are two people at opposite ends of something comparable ... its two characters going through a similar personal crisis, exacerbated by being in a foreign place. Trying to figure out your life in the midst of all that ... I always do that on trips, just start to think of these issues away from home ... being foreigners in Japan – things



are distorted, exaggerated. You're jet-lagged and contemplating your life in the middle of the night. Tokyo is ... so different ... much more foreign and unfamiliar with regard to the culture, the language. Everything's different, even getting the groceries. There's different rules and traditions that you learn as you go. The experience [of disorientation] can't last but it wouldn't be what it is if it was something that could last' (Coppola 2004)

7. Oberg (1960) suggests a 'U-shaped' model of adjustment by the traveller to an alien culture. Here, as Friedman, Dyke, and Murphy (2009) explain, initial excitement in the face of a new destination is followed by a period of disillusionment, then shock (the lowest point of the 'U') and followed by later adaptation and mastery. Hottola's diagnosis of confusion involves many periods of 'peak' and 'trough' before more stable adaptation is gained.

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